

History of Torrance Schools Discussed



THE FIRST BOARD . . . Judge John A. Shidler, now president of the board, administers the oath of office to Torrance's first board of education in 1947. Taking the oath (left to right) are Dr. Howard A. Wood, Mrs. Evelyn Carr, George P. Thatcher, Mrs. Grace Wright and Carl Steele.

Development of Local School System Noted

The Torrance school system, like its 6300 pupils, is growing like a weed.

It was just a little over five years ago that parents of the present Torrance School District, dissatisfied and unhappy about the shaggy dog treatment it was receiving from the Los Angeles System, broke away and formed their own district.

There were reasons for Torrance parents objecting to the "step-child" treatment given local schools. Torrance High School was regarded by some as a proving ground for new and inexperienced teachers and an island of exile for teachers who were "bad boys and girls." The paint on the walls was as old as some of the students in the senior class. The floors buckled and the plumbing leaked.

Determined to do something for their children, a group of Torrance parents launched a campaign to break away from the L. A. System to form the Torrance School District.

This spearheading organization was called the "Charter Committee." From it the voters of our town elected five members to serve as the first Board of Education. Handed the tremendous task of building a school system were Dr. Howard A. Wood, Mrs. Grace Wright, Carl D. Steele, Mrs. Evelyn Carr, and George P. Thatcher. Two of those original members, Mrs. Wright, and Steele are still serving.

The three other members of the present five-man board are Judge John A. Shidler, president, Dr. Rollin Smith and William H. Tolson.

When both the elementary schools and the high school came under local jurisdiction the district became known as the Torrance Unified School District.

When the first Board of Education was elected on March 18, 1947 they took inventory of what they had to work with.

Four school buildings. Fifty-two teachers. A new superintendent. A business manager. A budget of \$465,020.

In the following five years the school district, fertilized by several bond issues, progressive thinking, and eager hands, grew like a weed. Today the Torrance system is a multi-million business.

U. S. Steel Show Wins Radio 'Oscars' Again

For the third consecutive year United States Steel's full-hour dramatic program, "The Theatre Guild On the Air," has won the Academy of Radio and Television Arts and Sciences famed "Michael" award for meritorious achievement in radio.

The program's weekly reports to the nation on U. S. Steel's activities, which are delivered by George Hicks, also received a "Michael" award as the "best commercial presentation" in radio.

fine-print sleuths discovered gold in the form of federal aid for distressed school districts. Because this area is engaged in considerable defense work the government allowed the local school district \$152,000 to help educate the children of local defense workers. The money had to be asked for, requested—it was not sent to the district out of the goodness of the heart of Washington. An application for an additional grant has been sent to the capital.

There is an indication that through the efforts of the Torrance Board and district officials your schools may receive as much as \$2,000,000 in federal aid next year.

First of the contemplated projects to be started with the federal money is another elementary school—the Howard A. Wood, named in honor of the first board president. It will be erected near 235th St. and Arlington Ave., thus taking some of the load from the overcrowded Torrance Elementary School.

With one eye on a seemingly over-increasing population, the Torrance system has had to keep another eye on future needs.

Knowing that present schools, as well as those in the planning stage, will be full the moment they are completed, the Board has already purchased sites for future schools. The district has six sites on which one day soon, very soon in some cases, trenches will be dug for the foundations of another "little red school house."

Each day we make a little headway. When the new Madrona Ave. School opened earlier this year 329 students were taken off double sessions. When another new school, the Riviera School opens in the not-too-distant future, another 250 students will start full-day sessions.

Judge John A. Shidler, who administered the oath of office to the original Board of Education and who presently serves as president of the incumbent board sums up the situation this way:

"We all had ideas that it would be a big job, and that the town was going to grow, but none of us knew how fast the growth would take place, nor do we know how big the tremendous task is that we have ahead of us."

Safety Campaign Bearing Fruit In City Court

The city's campaign to cut down the toll of traffic accidents on Highway 101 in the Seaside Ranchos area is beginning to show up in City Judge Otto B. Willett's court.

During the past two weeks the police department has waged a concerted campaign in the area to slow down the traffic past the approaches to Seaside Ranchos and Hollywood Riviera.

Requests to the State to put traffic control signals in the area—scene of several fatal accidents—have brought only the posting of a 45-mile-per-hour speed limit through the area.

Evidence of the campaign was apparent in Judge Willett's court the past two Thursday afternoons. Case after case where the defendant was accused of speeding—he had been apprehended by officers in the Seaside area.

"I didn't know I was in Torrance," is a familiar plea when the offenders are brought into court.

City Vetoes Petition For Slough Aid Fund

Requests for a golf course in the Bixby Slough area to serve all of the Harbor communities were turned down Thursday afternoon by the Los Angeles City Recreation and Park Commission.

Petitioners were informed by the department that the request cannot be granted inasmuch as the 1952-53 budget of the City Recreation and Park Department must be less than that for the current fiscal year, and no capital improvements may be included therein.

Petitions signed by several thousand Harbor residents calling for city and county action to improve the slough area were presented last week. In addition, Councilman John S. Gibson introduced a resolution asking that Los Angeles City put \$100,000 into financing of the joint project.

The County Board of Supervisors has pledged \$50,000 for improvements, it is understood.

The City Commission pointed out that new municipal golf courses, as was planned for Bixby, are constructed with funds derived from the operation of existing city courses. The com-

Youth Group Meeting Planned for Tomorrow

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mission stated that it would look with favor on the construction of a 9-hole course in the portion of the slough under its control when another project is completed and vital materials needed for construction are "unfrozen" by the government.

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The inventory: Thirteen elementary school buildings. One high school and planning for another under way. 218 teachers. A payroll of over \$1,527,476. A budget of nearly \$2,000,000.

Back in those days people said it would take from five to 10 years to build a school system. It was done in five.

It has not been just a matter of mailing boards together to build schools or running "Want Ads" for teachers. We have built a district warehouse, a bus garage and other service units to maintain nine big yellow buses.

There is a carpenter shop where cabinetry and "built-in" furniture is constructed by district employees. By doing our own work the Board saves the "profits" that would go to an outside company.

A large complete district library distributes hundreds of books every day—collecting other books that are not in use and redistributing them to other students. Fewer books of any one issue are needed. A greater choice is possible and a reduced library budget is the result.

Other accomplishments, seldom heard about but as important to a school district as a signature on a check, are these: Such things have been developed as a teacher's handbook, administrative policy handbook and a new reporting system to parents.

Hundreds of carpenters, a fine climate, and lots of land have given the Torrance System a lot of headaches and have been responsible for much criticism and attacks on the various boards of education which have served this town without pay or compensation.

About the time the Board would finish a new school and think they would have a moment to lean back to look at it for a moment, "bang," would go the first blow of a carpenter's hammer on the first nail in a new tract of homes. The carpenters, with only a few simple rules to abide by, could build and will continue to build houses faster than schools.

Back in 1947 Torrance was a small town with lots of wide open spaces and only 14,000 people. Today, only five years later, we have more than doubled our population. Now we have 32,000 people. One out of every five of those persons attends a Torrance school. In 1947 there were 2600 students enrolled. Today, right now, if it is during school hours, some child from a recently-constructed home is registering in a Torrance school. A new teacher is hired on the average of once a week to care for the increased enrollment.

On the books the school district is in the black. The district has maintained a respectable cash balance at the end of each year and has remained within the maximum tax limit authorized by state laws. However, not all of the credit for past accomplishments belongs to the district officials and board members. The people have had a hand in it, too. A hand that four times has dipped into pocketbooks to provide, first, an override tax of 50 cents the first year and then three bond issues: one for \$1,322,000, another for \$2,000,000 and a third for \$3,000,000.

Long ago the district officials found it paid to read the "fine print." Last year Dr. J. H. Hull, superintendent of schools and his

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